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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Forest Service

Washington, November 7, 1945

Hunters Warned of Two New Forest Fire Risks

With the advent of this year's hunting season, an official of the U. S. Forest Service warned today of two new forest fire risks which he said developed during the war, namely, airplanes crashing in the woods and hunter use of tracer bullets originally obtained from the Army or Navy.

Perry A. Thompson, chief of the Division of Fire Control, said that more than 50 fires on National Forest land during the war have been traced directly to airplanes that crashed in the back country. Figures showed, he said, that the number of these instances has increased with the rising use of airplanes both by the military and by civilians. He urged hunters who might plan to use airplanes to be certain of their airworthiness, and not to take unnecessary chances over forests far from airports or landing fields.

"Growing use of airplanes, particularly in wild, mountainous country, has added another source of worry to the task of fighting forest fires," Thompson declared. "Not only have planes that crashed set fires, but planes have enabled hunters to go deeper into the forests, where fires are most difficult to reach, and it looks as if this problem will increase as airplanes become more widely used after the war. Fortunately, we were able to parachute fire fighters to fires in the back country or these airplane-caused fires would have done vastly more damage than they did."

Speaking of tracer bullets, Mr. Thompson said that while the Army and Navy had taken every precaution to prevent these highly inflammable bullets from getting into the hands of civilians a large number of forest fires had been proved to have been started by them. The records show, he added, that while there was an occasional instance of such fires before the war the number had been greatly increased during the war years. Forest Service records include several instances where it was proved that fires were deliberately set by persons using these bullets which, when fired into dry leaves or grass, are practically as effective as a torch. He called attention to regulations issued by the Secretary of Agriculture making it unlawful for hunters or others to use tracer bullets on National Forests.

For the country as a whole, Thompson said, forests are apt to be driest during hunting season when usually little rain falls, and for that reason the general fire hazard is high. He urged sportsmen to be especially careful this year with their campfires, matches and "smokes" while in the forest, and that they notify forest officials or other authority promptly should they discover a forest fire.

"Sportsmen can well assume the responsibility of helping prevent and control forest fires," he commented, "since by so doing they can perform a valuable public service. They should remember, too, that they can be pressed into service to help fight fires, in which case they can easily ruin their vacations or sporting trips."

By Capt. Don Carpenter, USFS

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